

Op Ed Piece for Albuquerque Journal

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A recent *Albuquerque Journal* editorial characterized the work being done at the national laboratories as involving “nonfunctioning toys” and “trinkets.” This view misrepresents both the importance and the complexity of the challenge facing the nation as it seeks to maintain the nuclear deterrent in the absence of nuclear testing.

For more than ten years, our science-based Stockpile Stewardship Program has successfully met this daunting challenge. The *Journal* editorial diminishes this success and it mischaracterizes the commitment and effort of the dedicated men and women who support this vital mission. We would like to set the record straight and offer a few important facts.

A decade ago, the United States chose to stop underground nuclear testing and, instead, certify the safety and reliability of its nuclear weapons stockpile by other methods. This new approach, the nation’s Stockpile Stewardship Program, required the development of many large-scale experimental facilities at Los Alamos National Laboratory, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Sandia National Laboratories, and the Nevada Test Site. These facilities extended state-of-the-art capabilities well beyond what was available a decade ago.

With all great scientific challenges, there are inherent risks. Yet successive Administrations, the Department of Energy and the Congress have directed the national laboratories to proceed with the development of a suite of scientific tools necessary to minimize these risks and maintain our nuclear deterrent without full-scale nuclear testing. Policymakers funded an ambitious plan to rapidly advance the science and technology necessary to understand the aging effects on nuclear warheads, components and materials and simulate the extraordinarily complex behavior of a nuclear detonation using large computers. In addition to the cutting-edge computer models and other analytical tools yet to be developed, the plan also required large-scale test facilities necessary to validate the

computer models. These experimental machines are not “toys” as labeled by the *Journal*; they are essential to certify the safety and reliability of nuclear warheads without underground testing as well as assist in solving warhead aging problems that might arise.

These critical experimental systems and facilities include the Dual Axis Radiographic Hydrotest (DAHRT) Facility at Los Alamos, the Z Machine at Sandia and the National Ignition Facility at Livermore. Many of these tools are in active use today while others are still under development. Yet all of these tools have provided excellent data and results that have been invaluable to the assurance of the safety and reliability of the nation’s stockpile.

For the last ten years, the laboratory directors have successfully employed the expertise of the scientists and engineers of the national laboratories to assure the Secretaries of Energy and Defense and the President of the United States of the safety, security and reliability of all the nation’s nuclear weapons. It is a solemn responsibility. Continued success of this effort requires these facilities to provide the scientific and engineering capabilities to sustain confidence in this approach. Because they are first-of-a-kind facilities, there can be adverse impacts on cost and schedule, but we remain committed to fulfilling our responsibilities as cost-effectively as possible.

No task can be more important than providing confidence in our nuclear deterrent to our government. We are committed to that mission for all of America.

Sincerely,

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